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General Assembly

Twenty-sixth special session

Official Records

6th meeting
Tuesday, 26 June 2001, 7.00 p.m.
New York

President Mr Holkeri ..... (Finland)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Lelong (Haiti), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 7.10 p.m.

Agenda item 7 (*continued*)

Review of the problem of human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS) in all its aspects

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): The Assembly will now hear an address by His Excellency Mr. Hamada Bolero, Prime Minister of the Islamic Federal Republic of the Comoros.

Mr. Bolero (Comoros) (*spoke in French*): Mr. President, speaking for the first time before this Assembly, I first wish to convey to you a message of support and solidarity from the head of State of the Islamic Federal Republic of the Comoros, Colonel Azali Assoumani, and his best wishes for success in our work.

Next, on behalf of the Government of the Comoros and of its delegation, which I have the honour of heading, and in my personal capacity, I wish to address our sincere thanks to Secretary-General Kofi Annan and to all of those who have contributed to the organization of this important international meeting on HIV/AIDS, an unparalleled initiative which translates the commitment and determination of the United Nations in bringing this issue to the attention of the international community.

It is, therefore, a meeting full of enormous hopes for our populations, who have been alarmed and traumatized by the spread of the epidemic and its devastating effects on humanity. In fact, due to the speed at which the disease is spreading, decades of development have certainly been wiped out; hence, the need for worldwide mobilization for stronger action.

We must be aware of several dimensions in the management of the struggle against the HIV/AIDS epidemic. First, the social dimension requires us to take into account the considerable loss of life, which is increasing daily. Next, there is an economic and financial dimension, because in weakening the most productive layers of society, and in slowing down economic growth, AIDS surely endangers the future of economic development. Finally, there is a cultural and educational dimension, which requires the intensification of preventive actions as a key element in the response.

To face this pandemic, we must take into account these three dimensions and start with innovative partnerships — innovative in terms of revising our approach and in our health care strategy; innovative in the measures designed to make medicines financially accessible; and innovative in the consistent attitude of being aware that the care given to the infected persons must go hand in hand with enormous moral support for them.

I wish to take this opportunity to pay a well deserved tribute to the World Health Organization (WHO), the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/

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AIDS (UNAIDS) and all governmental and non-governmental organizations which are working towards global action to combat this scourge of our time for the remarkable efforts they are making in this area. These efforts must be redoubled in certain regions, including Africa, which is bearing the brunt of the pandemic.

I wish to emphasize the importance of the Forum 2000, which was held at Addis Ababa, and the Abuja Declaration for the fight against HIV/AIDS, which solidifies the concern of high officials in Africa faced with this scourge.

In the Islamic Federal Republic of the Comoros, the HIV/AIDS pandemic is observed with the same fear and the same concern as in many countries which have been seriously affected. In fact, because of its insularity, its geographic position, and the seasonal tourism it attracts, the Comoros archipelago is exposed to this scourge. This situation makes it easy for people to travel from countries with a high prevalence of HIV/AIDS.

Since the first cases were detected in March 1988, my country has recorded 61 persons as carriers of HIV, of which 25 have died. Thus, in accordance with the health policy and the national health development plan, in 1990 the Government set up a national programme to combat sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS, which serves as an organizational and coordination structure.

At the political level, coordination is ensured by the interministerial and multisectoral committee which was established in October 1998. Furthermore, a thematic group composed of representatives of WHO, the United Nations Population Fund, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Development Programme and certain ministries and non-governmental organizations was established to provide technical support.

The Government of the Comoros is greatly concerned by the magnitude of the spread of the disease and has stressed certain essential actions retained in the plan of action drawn up for the period from 1999 to 2003. This plan of action, adapted to the world strategy as designed by UNAIDS, includes notification of cases and availability of and access to information and services, as well as mobilizing communities.

Preventing transmission through information, education, communication and transfusion security has become a greater priority than ever before. Special attention is granted to young people, for whom specific activities have been identified. Thus, upon the recommendation of the head of State, the Government of the Comoros decided to have widespread anti-AIDS clubs in schools and in youth associations, to include the item "fighting against AIDS" in the school curriculum and to teach parents about it through parent-teacher associations, and to involve all social strata by bringing in religious leaders, traditional leaders, and associations and other village structures.

The commitment of the head of State and the Government of the Comoros is further demonstrated by the opening of a budget line to support anti-AIDS programmes. There is a plan for establishing a technical superstructure for coordination and follow-up under the supervision of the presidency of the Republic, and for including this subject in all official statements of the head of State. However, the will of the Government faces many obstacles, in particular those of an economic and financial nature.

To that end, and keeping in mind these obstacles, my country once again calls for greater international solidarity, particularly at this crucial turning point of its history marked by the process of national reconciliation after four years of secessionist crisis. The embargo imposed on one of the Comoros Islands, Anjouan, has made the action of organizations and specialized structures to combat AIDS even more complicated.

I hope that this session will be a great opportunity to heighten our awareness of this danger that is invading our planet. May we combine our efforts in an ever greater way to limit the consequences.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to The Honourable John Seneviratne, Minister of Health of Sri Lanka.

Mr. Seneviratne (Sri Lanka): I bring warm greetings from Her Excellency Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, the President of Sri Lanka, to this gathering representing Governments and relevant organizations at this important special session. Her Excellency, who is also the current Chairperson of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, wishes to express her firm commitment to the global effort in the prevention and control of HIV/AIDS,

which has become a threat to the very existence of mankind. Her Excellency endorses the United Nations addressing the problems of HIV in all its aspects and regrets her inability to attend this special session because of national commitments.

Although a low-prevalence country, Sri Lanka has many factors to fuel an epidemic of HIV/AIDS if appropriate action is not taken to thwart such a disaster. Fifty-five per cent of our population is in the sexually active group. The problems of internal and external migration and displacement either for employment or on account of the ongoing conflict, narcotics usage, poverty and ignorance in some sectors are some of the potential contributory factors.

As the Assembly is aware, the epidemic that devastated Africa has reared its head in Asia with the same trends that were initially observed in Africa. Some of our neighbouring countries are already confronting epidemic proportions of the disease. Prevention is one of the main themes of this special session, and unless we wake up to this challenge, we will soon be facing the repercussions of the disease that our African brethren are facing today.

The Government of Sri Lanka is deeply committed to this cause. My Ministry, in collaboration with the Ministries of media, education, defence, tourism and social services, with the support of non-governmental organizations, is making a valiant effort to act on all aspects of this disease, especially targeting the most vulnerable groups in the tourist sector, sex workers, migrant workers, armed forces, the poor, youth and drug users.

Legislative acts on blood policy and the regulation of private blood banks to ensure blood safety have already been undertaken. The Government has taken steps to train all relevant sectors as an ongoing process, with continuous efforts to improve the infrastructure in order to effectively implement this programme.

Social marketing of condoms, use of antiretroviral drugs on a limited scales, with the assistance of non-governmental organizations, and human rights aspects are some of the issues the Government has already addressed. Aware of the global devastation caused by this disease that transcends all social, political, religious and ethnic barriers, I cannot be complacent, although we are still classified as a low-prevalence country. We have learned, at the cost of great human losses, the importance of preventing this disease.

Preventing vulnerable groups from entering the sex trade with a poverty-alleviation programme called Samurdhi, ensuring quality education and life competency skills for all and providing relevant vocational training for vulnerable groups and youth are a daunting challenge for the Government and are measures that would need international assistance.

I would like to highlight another crucial area of care, support and treatment that has been addressed as an important issue at this gathering. The cost of antiretroviral therapy and diagnosis creates boundaries of discrimination between the rich and the poor. As a human rights issue afflicting millions in the poorer countries and unborn children, I urge the United Nations to seriously address the issue of the provision of drugs and diagnosis at an affordable price to those countries that are less fortunate.

Let us work together to forge a strong, dynamic and sustainable partnership to fight this deadly disease in our region. To that end, I propose that the United Nations extend further assistance in establishing an Asian AIDS and health fund and an Asian partnership against HIV/AIDS. The stakeholders in this partnership should be the Asian Governments, the United Nations, the donors and relevant groups, including non-governmental organizations. This partnership should be based on mutual agreement, shared vision, common goals and trust. Every effort should be undertaken to curtail the spread of HIV, leading to the reversal of its course. This would reduce human suffering and assist in social and economic development in Asia.

Finally, let me quote Mr. Kofi Annan, whom I was privileged to listen to at the recent World Health Assembly:

> "Let us rise above turf battles and doctrinal disputes. The battle against AIDS is too important for us to risk side-tracking it by championing one institution against others. Only the results should matter, and the only acceptable result is that we replace suffering with hope."

This special session is a noble endeavour. May I, on behalf of Sri Lanka, wish it every success.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Hajar Bin Ahmed Hajar Al-Banali, Minister of Public Health of Qatar.

Mr. Al-Banali (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): I wish to thank you, Sir, for giving me the opportunity to express the position of the State of Qatar on this devastating pandemic that threatens the whole world.

When HIV/AIDS was first discovered 20 years ago, no one expected that this tiny virus would be the largest global health threat to mankind, as it disrupts the social and demographic structure, destroys economies and threatens the political stability of many countries. Furthermore, the emergence of new strains of HIV that resist the existing antiretroviral drugs makes it imperative that we develop a future strategy to effectively respond to these strains of the virus whenever they are detected. The worldwide spread of this dangerous disease requires us to be fully and collectively aware of its negative impact and to work towards stopping it.

During the last 20 years, we have accumulated great knowledge about all aspects of the disease, which should enable us to stop it from spreading further. It is now time to provide the necessary political commitment to utilize and apply this knowledge.

We in the State of Qatar believe in the importance of cultural diversity because we are confident that it enriches human progress and development. However, when some specific risky types of behaviour in certain societies become a source of danger for the rest of the world, being closely linked to the spread of HIV, then we are required to stand up to such behaviours.

The State of Qatar is doing its utmost to combat this disease and to limit its spread. Since we are not isolated from the rest of the world, we have diagnosed 164 cases during the last 20 years. Most of those individuals acquired the virus from blood transfusions before 1985. Although this number seems small, the relatively small population of the country, which is about 600,000, makes every newly discovered case a tragedy.

The State of Qatar provides all the necessary medical services and support to people living with HIV/AIDS, including retroviral therapy and psychological and social counselling for patients and their families, and ensures that they enjoy full civil and political rights.

The State of Qatar is convinced that the best way to prevent the spread of the disease is through increasing awareness among the population. It is worth noting that Qatar society remains religious, moral and conservative, which has helped limit the spread of the disease.

The ravaging spread of HIV throughout the world requires that we stand together, assume responsibility as a whole and rid ourselves of the mistaken notion that this disease is someone else's responsibility. Indeed, the world has become small and people are no longer isolated from each other, and any threat of infectious disease in any country of the world is a threat to the entire world.

Therefore, the State of Qatar supports the following steps. The first step is to tackle the debt problem of poor countries that are heavily afflicted by the pandemic. The second is to develop and improve the health systems of those countries in order to provide proper medical care, treatment and follow-up for HIV patients, and to allow the transfer of antiretroviral drugs and therapies. Monopolies on drugs should be prohibited in order to provide these drugs at affordable prices to low-income countries and ensure the continuity of their supply, regardless of the negative impact these policies may have on the profits of big pharmaceutical companies.

The third step is to share expertise in the area of HIV/AIDS prevention in order to limit the spread of the virus, using all necessary means and tools to achieve this, including the availability of condoms and sterile syringes.

The fourth step is to intensify support of relevant scientific research in order to speed the discovery of a definitive cure for the disease and to create an effective vaccine that can be used to eradicate the virus worldwide, as occurred with smallpox.

The fifth step is to provide a cure against latent tuberculosis infection for all HIV-infected individuals, since tuberculosis is the main cause of death among HIV-positive individuals in developing countries; it must be taken into consideration that the spread of HIV has created an environment propitious to the propagation of multiple-drug resistant tuberculosis.

The sixth and most important step, which will have an immediate, positive impact, is to direct greater investment and efforts towards increasing societal awareness of HIV/AIDS, and to create an international sense of responsibility at the individual level, with

greater emphasis on decent behaviour and adherence to moral values and virtues.

In conclusion, I extend my thanks to the President, to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, and to the others who have made such commendable efforts in organizing and sponsoring this special session of the General Assembly.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I call upon His Excellency Mr. Roman Kováč, Minister of Health of Slovakia.

Mr. Kováč (the Slovak Republic): First of all, I wish to congratulate the President on his election to lead the twenty-sixth special session of the General Assembly, devoted to the review of the problem of HIV/AIDS in all its aspects. Slovakia associated itself with the statement presented by the representative of Sweden on behalf of the European Union. Nevertheless, it is my pleasure and honour to make a statement on behalf of my country.

Please allow me to express my gratitude and great appreciation for the excellent work of the Preparatory Committee on the final document, the draft declaration of commitment on HIV/AIDS. I would like to assure the Assembly that Slovakia will continue to provide its support for the successful conclusion of this important special session.

Slovakia, like several other Central European countries, has been experiencing a complex economic transition, a part of which is the process of transforming the health sector.

In April of this year, the Ministry of Health of the Slovak Republic, in cooperation with civil society institutions, organized the advocacy meeting of the national programme on HIV/AIDS. Our aim was to strengthen commitment and intensify coordination and cooperation at all levels of society in combating the pandemic disease.

For moving to avoid critical future trends, the Slovak national AIDS programme has been recognized as the most significant element in this partnership. Besides the reinforcement of existing multisectoral cooperation, another area of responsibility is the development of complex preventive measures and antiretroviral treatment and care. Furthermore, it is imperative to mobilize adequate human and material resources.

The creation of a subregional partnership of national AIDS programmes is crucial for preventing HIV/AIDS from spreading. The strengthening of the international technical cooperation of UNAIDS and of the European Union's accelerated action programme on HIV/AIDS will provide significant assistance to my Government.

We wholeheartedly agree with the clear statement of principles made by the Secretary-General, and especially with the need for strong, committed leadership at every level of the multilateral fight against HIV/AIDS and the need for resources. We welcome the initiative to create the global AIDS and health fund, emphasizing that all efforts should be made in order to make the fund operational by the end of 2001.

We believe that this special session of the General Assembly is a great and unprecedented opportunity to combine and augment the efforts, resources and political will of the international community. Our unity will enable us to combat the HIV/AIDS epidemic and, hopefully, reverse its course.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Léon-Alfred Opimbat, Minister for Health, Solidarity and Humanitarian Action of the Congo.

Mr. Opimbat (Congo) (*spoke in French*): Mr. Sassou-Nguesso, President of the Republic of the Congo was unable to attend, and he appointed me his personal representative to this special session of the General Assembly on HIV/AIDS.

On his behalf, allow me first to congratulate you, the President, Secretary-General Kofi Annan and others for the holding of this special session and for the quality and depth of the Secretary-General's report. I should sincerely like to thank the Secretariat of the United Nations for having patiently organized this noble initiative to mobilize a world partnership against HIV/AIDS, as symbolized by the UNAIDS programme. Our thanks go likewise to the United Nations agencies, which have created and consolidated this national and world momentum, which is now our common credo.

Great scourges require great remedies. HIV/AIDS, as we know, is a very important public health problem, and a problem for socio-economic development and security. This scourge, unfortunately, has caused terrible setbacks to all humankind. The

spread and worsening of the disease have affected my country and our subregion, Central Africa, in terms of poverty, malnutrition, illiteracy, and armed conflicts, which have caused massive forced displacements of populations.

The battle against HIV/AIDS in our specific situation requires the restoration of peace and stability and the alleviation of poverty. Our people and our Government are now resolutely committed to these goals. The recent holding of the all-inclusive national dialogue and the signing of the national convention on peace and development illustrate this point. We express our profound gratitude to the international community, to friendly countries, to external partners and in particular, to the international mediator, El Hadj Omar Bongo, President of the Republic of Gabon, for their support to my country in this process.

AIDS is an undeniable reality, a pandemic that requires a global response at all levels, in a spirit of love, altruism and solidarity, for the sake of the survival of humankind. This is our individual and collective responsibility and duty. Clearly, this goal presupposes a commensurate mobilization of resources of all kinds, particularly financial resources, at every level. There is a great temptation to think that the poor and developing countries are the weak link in this initiative. However, we must recognize the outstanding efforts made by the poor or developing countries in the battle against HIV/AIDS, and in the strengthening of health services, particularly in the areas of information, education and communication, the social marketing of condoms, counselling, training, operational research and the rehabilitation of the health sector. But access to care in general and to antiretrovirals in particular, as well the financing of our health-care systems, continue to pose enormous problems for our peoples.

In our poor and developing countries the ability to take action is limited by several factors. In particular there is the external debt burden, which reduces public investment and keeps States in the cycle of poverty. The reduction or cancellation of this debt, in a spirit of international solidarity, would free up money for the struggle against this disease in our countries. Even in this case, complementary financial support from the international community, and in particular from the most industrialized countries, remains indispensable.

We have increasingly stressed cooperation in subregional and regional groups, and we request consistent support from such groups. We are pleased by the Secretary-General's proposed establishment of a global fund for HIV/AIDS and health, and we hope that the rich countries and generous donors will help ease the suffering of the poor by contributing regularly and substantially to this fund. While recognizing the efforts made by certain pharmaceutical companies in reducing the prices of antiretrovirals and in social-oriented activities, we hope that they, and other companies that have been slow in responding, will do more here.

In conclusion, it will be largely in this way and in the framework of a dynamic global partnership that we can expect to achieve a true and effective victory over HIV/AIDS for the benefit of all humanity.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Peter Coleman, Minister of Health and Social Welfare of Liberia.

Mr. Coleman (Liberia): It is with great pride that I represent the Republic of Liberia on this momentous occasion. Understanding the global impact of HIV/AIDS, the President of the Republic of Liberia, Mr. Charles G. Taylor, would like to thank the United Nations for convening this General Assembly special session as a demonstration of its commitment to ensuring that the world joins hands in this concerted effort to combat HIV/AIDS. With sub-Saharan Africa under attack by this deadly pandemic, it is incumbent upon Liberia to do its share in minimizing the effect on our populace and to contribute to a decrease in the rate of infection on our continent, and hence in the world.

With our current prevalence rate at an alarming 8.2 per cent, we find ourselves on the verge of an explosion. Conventional interventions seem effective, but still leave a gap between awareness and education. With negative influencing factors such as a high illiteracy rate, massive migration and an increasing level of poverty in Liberia, we are left with no option other than adopting a new approach in consonance with the resolutions enshrined within the framework of the African Development Forum and the Abuja Declaration. As partnership and leadership at all levels are the keys to curbing the trend of this disease, we must explore and foster new forms of collaboration and strengthen existing ones, within the framework of the international partnership against AIDS. In this way we should be able to develop a holistic approach which will include, inter alia, care and support for people

living with AIDS, the empowerment of women and different measures geared towards poverty alleviation.

As Liberians endeavour to come to terms with the recently imposed United Nations sanctions, which have brought additional hardship to the war-weary population of Liberia, we would like to express our profound gratitude to the Government and the people of the Republic of China for the various types of assistance we have received in the revitalization of our health sector. We would like to make specific mention of the donation of 5 million condoms to strengthen our HIV/AIDS interventions. In other areas of health care, the Taiwan Roots Medical Peace Corps, which responds to appeals for emergency relief from countries confronted with armed conflict or natural disaster, has carried out two campaigns in Liberia, treating about 1,500 patients.

The Government of France has also stepped up its support for our three-year multisectoral strategic plan of action in the area of HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention. As a result, two volunteer counselling and testing centres have been established.

In spite of these contributions, there is still need for additional bilateral and multilateral funding. The current level of resources mobilized and invested in HIV/AIDS prevention and care and in poverty alleviation needs to be more than doubled. This sort of assistance is indispensable if we are to succeed in this fight against this deadly disease. The problem of external international obligations creates even greater difficulties, in that we are harnessed with the strangulating problem of debt relief. The fight against HIV/AIDS would have a greater chance of success if the developed countries would streamline the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Debt Initiative so as to make it less of a burden on developing countries, and especially on those emerging from civil crises.

The Government and the people of Liberia would like to take this occasion to commend the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his bold initiative to establish a global fund for the fight against HIV/AIDS. Liberia is committed to this fund and hereby pledges $25,000 to it. We must all demonstrate our national commitment to fighting this scourge by contributing to the fund, and also by developing mechanisms for the sustenance of the interventions that will be supported by the global fund. All efforts must be made to ensure the affordability of life-saving medicines and other commodities in poor countries, through price reduction and other mechanisms.

The number of people living with HIV/AIDS now stands at 36.1 million globally, with sub-Saharan Africa accounting for about 75 per cent of this total. There are also 13.5 million children who have been orphaned by HIV/AIDS. Already we cannot afford to educate the majority of children on our continent. How can we care for them?

We would also like to commend the Government of Nigeria and the Organization of African Unity (OAU) for hosting the OAU Summit on HIV/AIDS, the first of its kind on our continent.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now call on His Excellency The Honourable Gaston Browne, Minister of Planning, Implementation and Public Service Affairs of Antigua and Barbuda.

Mr. Browne (Antigua and Barbuda): Antigua and Barbuda welcomes the opportunity to participate in this special session of the General Assembly on HIV/AIDS, to secure a global commitment for enhanced coordination and the intensification of efforts to combat the pandemic.

The first case of HIV/AIDS in Antigua and Barbuda was recorded in December 1985, and we have seen a steady increase in reported cases during the past 15 years. We have utilized our scarce resources wisely to build our human capital and have made significant strides over the years. However, the prevalence of HIV in Antigua and Barbuda and the wider Caribbean — which is among the highest in the world, ranking second only to sub-Saharan Africa — is threatening to reverse our developmental gains. The pandemic has demographic, social and economic implications for our populations and is now the most serious developmental challenge facing the Caribbean. Today, HIV/AIDS threatens the literacy levels, life expectancy, human-skill resources, prosperity and productive capacities of our respective countries.

Our national HIV/AIDS response programme is essentially one of prevention through a strategy of informing and educating our general population. The programme is funded almost entirely by the Government of Antigua and Barbuda and augmented with external assistance from several agencies. We would like to take this opportunity to thank these agencies, including UNAIDS and the Caribbean

Epidemiology Centre, for the assistance they have extended to us. We recognize the importance of providing care and support for HIV-infected persons and their families and we have sought to do so within the constraints of our extremely limited resources.

A programme of voluntary HIV testing among pregnant women was introduced in Antigua and Barbuda in March 1999 as part of our national intervention to reduce HIV transmission from mother to child. Regrettably, our financial resources do not permit us to offer combination therapy to these mothers. Also, we are now grappling with the very difficult and urgent issue of care and support for our children orphaned by AIDS. We call upon the international community for much-needed assistance to contain the prevalence of HIV and the management of AIDS in the Caribbean.

Taking full cognizance of the complexity of HIV/AIDS and its developmental challenges, our vision is to inspire and mobilize all stakeholders to enter into partnerships, to take responsibility, to provide leadership to create, sustain and support an environment of prevention of HIV transmission through the adoption of safer sexual behaviours and to promote more supportive environments for people living with HIV/AIDS.

HIV/AIDS has infected in excess of 60 million individuals, of whom over 22 million have died in 20 years. This has been the most vicious disease in the history of mankind, and if we do not make the prevention and cure of HIV/AIDS a global priority, we may be faced with the extinction of the human race.

The effective management and reversal of the devastating effects of the pandemic cannot be achieved at the national level given the enormity of the resources required to fight the disease. The resources required to fight this killer disease necessitate a coordinated and systematic global response.

Antigua and Barbuda supports the call for a global coordinated response to combating HIV/AIDS as a priority agenda item for all countries and multilateral and regional institutions. We support the call for the establishment of a global AIDS and health Fund to increase resources to contain and eventually develop a cure for AIDS. Contributions to this fund should take precedence over military spending, and the fund should be easily accessible to all. We support the call for the introduction of concessionary pricing for HIV antiretroviral drugs for developing countries to increase accessibility to treatment for individuals living with HIV/AIDS.

In addition, we propose the establishment of a global AIDS council, comprising heads of State and heads of the various multilateral institutions, scientists and corporate leaders. They would act as advocates for the procurement of increased investments and commitment for HIV/AIDS prevention and cure, and against discrimination against individuals living with HIV/AIDS and the stigmatization of the disease.

HIV/AIDS is not only a developmental challenge in that it destroys the most productive human resources, but is also now a fundamental threat to national sovereignty and global security. The threat of the AIDS pandemic requires full global commitment at the highest political level and a coordinated approach to effectively manage and ultimately develop a cure for HIV/AIDS.

Let us not deny the realities of HIV/AIDS; let us not stigmatize and discriminate against individuals living with HIV/AIDS. HIV/AIDS is non-discriminatory; it kills and impoverishes millions of people annually, without distinction to age, gender, ethnicity, status or income standing. Finding a solution requires global solidarity. Let us come together in solidarity and fight to combat this deadly disease that is threatening the survival of mankind.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to Her Excellency The Honourable Jacqueline Theodore, Acting Minister of Health and Social Security of Dominica.

Ms. Theodore (Dominica): The Commonwealth of Dominica welcomes this opportunity to participate in this United Nations special session devoted to the examination of HIV/AIDS in all its tragic dimensions and global ramifications.

The depressing statistics and horrifying magnitude of the HIV/AIDS pandemic are well known to all of us assembled here; there is therefore no need for further recitation. But there is an urgent need for the international community to make a determined, committed and serious effort to arrest the alarming infection rates in those parts of the world least able to deal effectively with the problem. There is an urgent need to begin at once to act with the resolve of the Millennium Summit so that we can reverse the spread

of HIV/AIDS by 2015. There is an urgent and compelling need for us to marshal the forces and resources necessary to deal with what the Secretary-General has labelled the greatest public health challenge of our time.

In small developing societies like the Commonwealth of Dominica the HIV/AIDS contagion is much more than a public-health challenge. We are already hampered by a severely limited financial and human resource base, and the rising incidence of HIV/AIDS continues to undermine our development efforts on many fronts. With the highest rates of infection occurring in the age group of those between 24 and 54 years old, the productive capacity of the country is being diminished simultaneously with greater demands on our meagre financial resources, both private and public, for increased spending on care and facilities for the victims and to mitigate the devastating social and economic consequences of the disease.

The first case of HIV infection in the Commonwealth of Dominica was diagnosed in 1987. Since then, the virus has been identified in increasing numbers of persons, with a shift from predominantly men who have sex with men to a more heterosexual mix, so that the gender balance of infected persons has changed from almost exclusively male in the 1980s to a ratio of almost 2:1 male to female.

A comprehensive information and education campaign undertaken through the media, schools and community groups has been in existence in Dominica since 1986, and this is being incorporated into the Health and Family Life Education Programme for schools. A National AIDS Committee charged with providing guidance to the Ministry of Health and Social Security and comprising Government agencies, civil society, the private sector and religious organizations has been in place since 1988.

Regionally, our efforts have been greatly assisted by the Caribbean Epidemiological Centre and the Pan American Health Organization, which are currently working with us to develop a five-year strategic plan to deal with the HIV/AIDS situation. The plan uses a multisectoral approach in line with guidelines from the Caribbean Regional Strategic Plan of Action approved by the heads of Government of the Caribbean Community in July last year, and it will be informed by successful programmes from within the Caribbean region and beyond.

Despite our best national and regional efforts, however, the rates of infection in the Caribbean are second only to those of sub-Saharan Africa. Dominica ranks the second highest among the islands of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States in numbers of persons infected with HIV. The simple fact is that much more is demanded of us if we are to realize some measure of success in the containment and eventual reversal of the spread of HIV/AIDS in Dominica and the Caribbean region — more in terms of greater capacity-building; more for the implementation of innovative education programmes to effect behavioural change and to assist our young people in particular to fully understand their vulnerability to contracting HIV; and more poverty reduction programmes and greater accessibility to more affordable drugs and treatment facilities.

Small developing islands like Dominica cannot do it alone. The international community must be committed to the struggle. That is why we applaud the efforts of the Secretary-General in seeking to establish the global trust fund to fight AIDS and other infectious diseases. But early responses are not encouraging, and there are serious doubts with respect to the level of funding likely to be achieved. The prospect of the poor receiving the full benefits of the fund are dimmed by the call to respect intellectual property rights and adherence to the World Trade Organization's rules.

The affordability of drugs for victims of HIV/AIDS in poor countries like Dominica must be one of the objectives of the fund. Therefore, producers of generic anti-AIDS drugs are essential to the success of the fund's programmes. We cannot continue to elevate the excessive profits of the major pharmaceutical companies above the suffering of millions.

The Commonwealth of Dominica is committed at the highest level to fighting HIV/AIDS. Bearing in mind the limited resources available nationally and regionally, the present infection rates and the difficulties encountered in effecting positive changes in attitudes and behaviours; and recognizing the potential for an even more rapidly escalating crisis in the Caribbean region, the Commonwealth of Dominica calls upon the international community and industrialized nations in particular, to work seriously to

achieve the goals and targets agreed to in the draft declaration of commitment.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to Mr. Ahmed El-Atrash, Chairman of the delegation of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya.

Mr. El-Atrash (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) (*spoke in Arabic*): This twenty-sixth special session of the General Assembly is being held to study the problem of HIV/AIDS, the greatest catastrophe in human history, and to search for strong measures against it. This horrendous pandemic respects no national or racial boundaries, affecting everyone, rich or poor, without distinction as to age, sex or ethnicity. We are facing a historic challenge today. States, Governments, organizations, pharmaceutical companies and individuals must work seriously to tackle this invading danger. We must all face up to our responsibilities. We must go beyond selfish national interests and respect the spirit and the letter of the draft declaration of commitment. We must mobilize all the necessary financial resources and materials to implement it.

The countries of the world — and, despite their meagre resources, the countries of the third world in particular — have committed themselves in the draft declaration under consideration to attain specific goals. There is no doubt that those countries will do their best to respect their commitments. But it is unfortunate to note that the response of developed, wealthy countries is not commensurate with this human disaster.

Preventing HIV/AIDS should be the main target upon which all national, regional and international measures are focused. Prevention, along with care and treatment for all those affected by the virus, should be complementary elements of any effective response. Prevention should entail campaigns to raise awareness of the dangers of the disease through educational and information activities and the provision of food, vaccinations and health care.

We would like to stress the importance of moral, religious and spiritual values, which we believe to be a safety valve allowing us to avoid being tempted into dangerous and far from normal relationships that increase contagion among adolescents and young persons, who are the backbone of our peoples. It is a sin to accept homosexuality and to ask that it be accepted. Homosexuality is one of the main causes of this disease. This sin does not respect divine rules prohibiting homosexual practices. In fact, God sent the prophet Lot with a clear message prohibiting such practices.

We emphasize the importance of ensuring that the international community confronts the problems associated with the pandemic. In particular, those problems include poverty, poor socio-economic conditions, the deterioration of educational systems and estrangement from religious values. We in Africa are committed to do our best to face the pandemic and other dangerous diseases threatening our peoples. Our leaders committed themselves at the special meeting at Abuja to devote at least 15 per cent of our national annual budgets to improve and strengthen the health sector and to bolster efforts aimed at combating HIV/AIDS. Along with that, we believe that the international community — and wealthy countries in particular — should shoulder their responsibilities to provide financial and material support to strengthen the national capacities of developing countries.

Despite the blockade and the unfair resolutions imposed against it, and on the basis of its profound responsibility to defend human rights to health, well being and effective treatment when people become ill, Libya announced the establishment of a South-South fund for health care at the South summit held in Havana last year. An Africa centre for contagious diseases is being set up, and our leader, Muammar Al-Qadhafi, has announced that the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya will bear most of the expenses for this centre. We hope this initiative will awaken everyone's conscience and encourage people to participate actively to ensure that this foundation will succeed and create other foundations to coordinate with it, with Governments, with international organizations, international corporations and research centres to mobilize efforts in the fight against this lethal disease.

The holding of this special session of the General Assembly is certainly an historic event and a rehabilitation of the role of the Assembly in facing world problems. History and humankind will make us accountable for actions, not simply for declarations. Crying over the millions who have died from this pandemic and feelings of compassion for the millions who are afflicted by it will not be consolation. If United Nations declarations are not implemented, then sick people will not be able to obtain necessary care or treatment.

As part of the international community, we in the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya want to protect our people from the dangers of this pandemic by providing all the necessary care, as well as prevention and respect for the Islamic religion, which has protected us from this horrible disease.

But criminals and evil hands have brought us tragedy. More than 400 children, from 2 months to 14 years old, have become victims. They were purposely injected with the HIV virus, and a great number of them died. Justice authorities in our country have been looking into this terrible crime for the past two years and will decide, through justice and integrity, what to do with those who have encouraged and committed the crime and with their motives.

In conclusion, I wish to thank the Secretary-General for the important role he is playing in mobilizing all potentialities to deal with this disease. We welcome the creation of the global fund for AIDS; we think it should be under the supervision of the World Health Organization in order to ensure transparency, considering the competence of that organization.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to Mr. Tengiz Tsertsvadze, Head of the Supervisory Board, Scientific Centre for Infection Pathology, AIDS and Clinical Immunology of Georgia.

Mr. Tsertsvadze (Georgia): On behalf of Government of Georgia, I would like to welcome the United Nations initiative to organize this special session of the General Assembly on HIV/AIDS. We believe that this session will serve as a milestone and have a significant impact on prevention and control of the HIV/AIDS epidemic worldwide.

The post-totalitarian period has been very hard for Georgia, as for all the former Soviet countries. Despite the difficulties, Georgia has embarked upon the road of democratic reform. While this road is not easy, we are very optimistic and believe in a better future.

According to expert assessment, the health care system is one of the sectors where the reform process has been implemented successfully. Of course, this would not have been possible without the generous support of the international community.

At present, the number of reported HIV/AIDS cases in Georgia is 229. The number of people living with HIV/AIDS is estimated to be approximately 1,500. Even though Georgia is currently among the countries with low HIV/AIDS prevalence, we are experiencing a small but steady increase in the number of HIV/AIDS cases. The experts predict that unless urgent preventive measures are undertaken immediately, we can expect a rapid spread of HIV/AIDS in Georgia in the near future. This dire prognosis is based on the analysis of the current epidemiological situation in Georgia and neighbouring countries, all of which are experiencing widespread drug abuse, increased migration, and lack of disposable medical instruments and diagnostic test systems, among other factors.

Currently, Georgia is still within the so-called "window of opportunity" for preventing the massive spread of HIV/AIDS. However, there are many challenges to be faced and overcome. The Government of Georgia is well aware of the great importance of the HIV/AIDS problem and considers it one of the top priorities for its health care system.

A law on AIDS prevention was formulated and approved by the Georgian Parliament as early as March 1995. The National AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD) Control Commission, with membership from different ministries, is responsible for the formulation of national AIDS control policy and for ensuring effective multisectoral collaboration. There is a well-established HIV/AIDS control service in Georgia, directed by the Georgian Scientific Centre for Infection Pathology, AIDS and Clinical Immunology in Tbilisi. Since 1995, the National HIV/AIDS STD Prevention and Blood Safety Programme has been implemented in Georgia.

All modern HIV/AIDS diagnostic and treatment methods are available. However, due to the lack of necessary resources, we are not able to provide specific antiretroviral treatment for all AIDS patients. For this reason, we believe that the inclusion of Georgia in the list of countries that are eligible for a considerable discount in the price of specific anti-HIV medicines would be extremely helpful.

A national multisectoral HIV/AIDS programme was developed to facilitate the full mobilization of governmental and non-governmental organizations and the entire Georgian society to address this problem. However, we still cannot succeed without considerable assistance from international organizations.

In this regard, we are grateful to the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS and the United Nations Children's Fund for their significant and continuous support. With their financial and methodological assistance, we have been able to conduct a comprehensive situation and response analysis and have developed a strategic plan for HIV/AIDS for the next five years. We have also had small-scale projects with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the United Nations Population Fund and the World Health Organization, but, unfortunately, the involvement of the relevant agencies in anti-HIV/AIDS activities is not significant in Georgia. Also, we collaborate with the United States Agency for International Development and its affiliated organizations. We hope that such collaboration will be enhanced in the future.

In conclusion, I would like to express our hope that this special session of the General Assembly will not only develop new, more effective policies and approaches to HIV/AIDS prevention and control worldwide, but also address the needs of particular countries, including Georgia. We have great confidence in international collaboration and assistance for the defeat of AIDS. On our part, let me assure the Assembly that the Georgian Government will do its best to implement the decisions and recommendations of this special session.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Naste Čalovski, chairman of the delegation of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

Mr. Čalovski (Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia): I would like to join the previous speakers who have congratulated Mr. Holkeri on his election as President of the General Assembly at this twenty-sixth special session on HIV/AIDS and to express the hope of the Republic of Macedonia that the declaration of commitments that the Assembly is going to adopt will be an important part of the efforts of our Organization to fight the epidemic and a crucial step in raising awareness about the disease.

Before I state the views of my Government, let me stress the important role and efforts of the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, who has done so much for the success of this initiative. I would also like to mention the contribution of my colleagues, Ambassador Wensley of Australia and Ambassador Ka of Senegal, for their successful preparation of this special session.

The epidemic of HIV/AIDS that we are facing globally has acquired such catastrophic proportions that we have to respond together with a very strong determination and sense of urgency to fight it. The Governments, the private sector and non-governmental organizations should join all their forces for a massive mobilization against the epidemic. In this respect, we share the view of the Secretary-General that "the world has the resources to defeat this epidemic if it really wants to". We hope that that will happen. The Republic of Macedonia will make its contribution to this common endeavour against HIV/AIDS.

HIV/AIDS in the Republic of Macedonia is a relatively new phenomenon. However, there are signs and factors favourable to the spread of the disease. The first HIV-positive case was registered in 1987 and the first AIDS case in 1989. In April this year, the number of officially registered HIV/AIDS cases was 56, representing 40 cases of AIDS and 16 cases registered as HIV-positive. The number of people who have died as a result of AIDS is 36 out of 40. However, this data does not reflect the real situation: 99 per cent of those registered as HIV-positive came to the hospitals by themselves because of health problems related to the infection.

The disease in our country has been spread by heterosexuals and heroin users. Vertical transmission has also been detected. The ages of most of those infected are between 20 and 29. Males and females alike are affected. The Republic of Macedonia is at the crossroads of the Balkans, as members are aware. We are continuously fighting against the illegal traffic in drugs, small arms and light weapons, and people, now with Albanian terrorists. All this is good grounds for the spread of this disease.

Since 1997, the national HIV/AIDS programme has been implemented through the Ministry of Health, mainly oriented to address the health aspects of HIV/AIDS. The Ministry of Health has established a National AIDS Commission. It is entrusted with the implementation of the professional side of the Programme for the Protection of the Population of Macedonia from AIDS. The National HIV/AIDS Commission, together with the United Nations agencies accredited in the country and organized into a United Nations theme group, has been assigned the

responsibility to develop and implement a comprehensive multisectoral national strategic plan for the next three to four years.

This programme is a continuation of the intensive efforts to implement measures and activities aimed at preventing and wiping out HIV infections and AIDS in Macedonia, applying attitudes and guidelines recommended by the World Health Organization, the United Nations Children's Fund and other relevant United Nations organizations. Measures and activities undertaken to apply the programme are the following: the establishment of a system of epidemiological investigation and surveillance; laboratory research; the education of health workers; and health education for the whole population, especially for the group of people with risky behaviour. The Republic of Macedonia collaborates closely with neighbouring countries to monitor the progress of the HIV threat on a regional basis.

The preparations for this session have clearly demonstrated that the implementation of the targets adopted at the United Nations Millennium Summit is imperative to the international community. There is no doubt that prevention must be the mainstay of our response; that the care, support and treatment must be effective; and that we have to pay special attention to the vulnerable. All efforts against the HIV/AIDS epidemic are important at the national, regional and global levels and strong leadership at all levels of society is essential. We place high hopes in the implementation of the declaration we are going to adopt and in the effectiveness of the global fund on AIDS and health proposed by the Secretary-General.

Let me conclude this statement by stressing that our battle against HIV/AIDS should be seen as an important part of the battle against poverty, for development, that unprecedented mobilization of resources is needed and that global response and solidarity are essential.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to the representative of the Secretariat for some information.

Mr. Perfiliev (Director, General Assembly and ECOSOC Affairs Division): I would like inform members that the draft resolution submitted by the President of the General Assembly entitled "Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS" is being distributed now in the General Assembly Hall. The text of the draft resolution will be available in all languages in the delegation boxes tomorrow morning. However, if delegations so wish, the language versions may also be picked up tonight in Room S-2925, in the Secretariat building, in the General Assembly and ECOSOC Affairs Division.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Mohammed Rashid Al-Absi, Chairman of the delegation of the United Arab Emirates.

Mr. Al-Absi (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): On behalf of the delegation of the United Arab Emirates, it is my honour to congratulate the President on his assumption of the presidency for the special session of the General Assembly on HIV/AIDS.

I wish to take this opportunity to thank and express appreciation to our Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, and to all those involved in United Nations programmes for their efforts to mobilize all possible international efforts to confront this dangerous epidemic.

Holding this important session reflects the growing awareness of the international community of the magnitude and dangers of this mortal disease; its devastating repercussions are not limited to the fact that it is a fleeting health problem. It is a true human global scourge that imperils the future of family, societies and States, and it jeopardizes human, social and economic development efforts.

It is a source of concern to see that the official morbidity statistics have been growing every year. They show that at the end of last year about 36 million people were infected and that 95 of the countries affected are developing countries. This disease was detected in 1981, and it has caused the death of about 22 million people, most of whom are women and young people living in deplorable conditions. Despite the progress we have seen in scientific research in trying to combat the virus, the scourge is still with us.

The growing seriousness of the problem, the spread of this disease and the fact that there is a close link between its spread and the scourges of poverty, ignorance, conflicts, drugs, social and gender discrimination and the lack of antiretroviral drugs, particularly in the developing countries, have all but prevented most of these countries from individually confronting this dangerous scourge. This means

primarily that we must have a universal political commitment based on a real international partnership involving concerted strategic approaches to help developing countries gain access to medical technology, vaccines, drugs and medicines in order to deal with this virus at affordable prices.

This approach could help provide the necessary treatment to patients. In this context, while we pay tribute to the efforts made by international agencies and organizations — including the World Health Organization, the United Nations Development Programme and UNAIDS — in trying to combat HIV/AIDS, we also appeal for the development of resources, capacities and coordination mechanisms from these organizations so that we can see better mobilization and incorporation of their efforts and programmes.

The United Arab Emirates is aware of the need to protect our citizens' health, given that its citizens are its true national wealth. We have taken all precautions to detect the disease at an early stage and to provide preventive methods and information to people to help them confront the disease and to contain it despite the limited number of infections. We have also established a comprehensive national programme with an ad hoc budget. This programme carries out prevention and early detection services and provides access to the drugs people need. We also follow ongoing international research on the disease and draw on that research as well as encourage national production of drugs to combat it.

We have reviewed our laws and local legislation to guarantee all human rights to the infected, particularly providing access to health care, treatment, social services, education and employment, without any discrimination at all against them.

We have also provided education and informational and training programmes to teach people about this disease, its causes and the means to stop its spread. At the regional and international levels, the United Arab Emirates has actively participated in all meetings, conferences and scientific seminars to consider all aspects of this disease. We have also organized three world conferences in our country.

In conclusion, we pin great hope on current scientific research to discover an effective antiviral vaccine. However, we hope that the efforts of the international community will lead to the adoption of a strategy and a clear plan of action, one that will live up to the aspirations of all countries and that aims at combating this disease, reducing the number of its victims and at providing drugs and treatment to all those afflicted by it.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now call on Mr. Viktors Jaksons, adviser to the Minister for Welfare and Chairman of the delegation of Latvia.

Mr. Jaksons (Latvia): First of all, I would like to commend the Secretary-General for the comprehensive, action-oriented report and to reaffirm our support for it. We particularly recognize the statement contained in the draft declaration of commitment on HIV/AIDS that respect for human rights reduces vulnerability to HIV/AIDS.

We are aware that public health is one of the most important requirements for successful social and economic development, while HIV/AIDS is recognized as a major threat.

HIV/AIDS is now a classic, modern health issue, closely connected with individual and collective human behaviour, strongly influenced by broad social and economic forces and linked particularly closely to social discrimination. HIV is a greater risk for those people and groups who are already marginalized, stigmatized and therefore discriminated against within the larger society. We recognize that development, health and human rights are correlated issues.

Since regaining independence, Latvia, together with other Baltic Sea countries, has been facing common problems in the area of health in general, and HIV/AIDS in particular. The region, which during the last four years was characterized by a low prevalence of HIV, is facing an extremely steep increase in the number of new infections.

HIV does not respect borders. The epidemiological situation in one country will affect other countries in the region, and it requires concerted action. As a result of consultations, called the Baltic Sea initiative on HIV/AIDS prevention, the Governments of the region declared their commitment to the implementation of the Baltic Sea action plan, a set of urgent interventions to prevent a widespread HIV epidemic in the region.

Acknowledging that non-discriminatory legislation and protective laws create a supportive legal and political environment for the success of public

health development and national HIV/AIDS prevention efforts, the Latvian Government revised and adopted an adequate legislative infrastructure. Three basic acts — a law on medicine, a law on epidemiological safety, and governmental regulations — ensure that every member of society, including people living with HIV/AIDS, is entitled to access to information and education on health; that HIV testing of an individual is voluntary and confidential; that an infected individual may work at any trade or profession; and that antiretroviral therapy for people with HIV infection is available free, so far.

From the very beginning, HIV prevention in Latvia has been developing in the mainstream of health policy development. Ongoing health care reform is advanced in collaboration with, and with the assistance of, United Nations institutions and programmes. Since 1997, the United Nations resident coordinator in Latvia has chaired the United Nations theme group on HIV/AIDS, in which all relevant ministries and non-governmental organizations participate. The theme group has become the de facto national forum for the exchange of information and operational coordination.

We will continue the development and implementation of the multisectoral strategy for combating HIV/AIDS, focusing on the specific dimension of human rights in our efforts to limit the spread of HIV/AIDS.

The meeting rose at 8.50 p.m.